

WE BEND, WE DON'T BREAK

A ZINE BY THE NEW WESTMINSTER COMMUNITY ACTION TEAM



We Bend, We Don't Break

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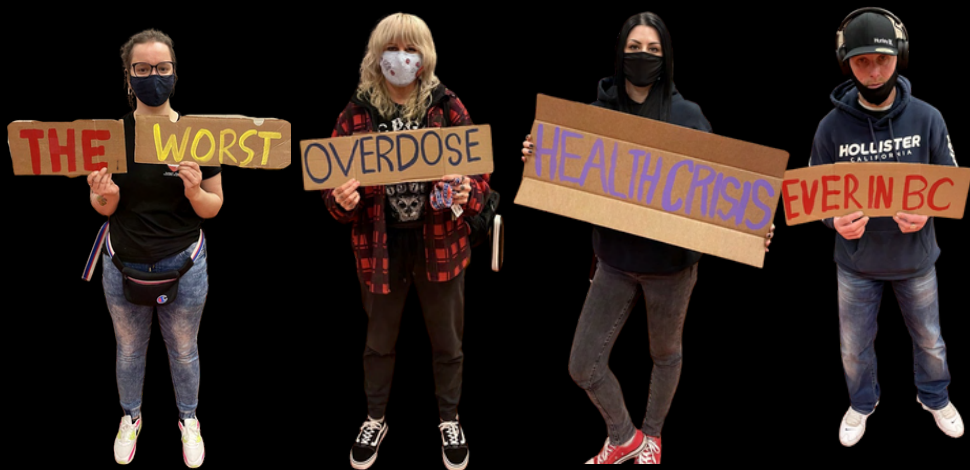
Published on the stolen and occupied territories of the Halq'eméylem speaking peoples.

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Edited by Lola Ječmenica





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DEAR READER,

This publication is an ode to all those who fight the detrimental effects of the war on drugs every single day.

More than 14,000 people have died from toxic drugs since British Columbia declared a public health emergency in April of 2016. From 2014 to 2024, 273 of those deaths occurred in New Westminster, with the majority of unregulated drug deaths occurring inside private residences.¹ Stigma, alongside poor drug policies and poisoned drugs, is driving this crisis.

No one said harm reduction is easy or painless. No one said it's easy to love someone. Love is hard. Love is work. Love is messy. Love is commitment. Love, like harm reduction, can exist in the shades of greys, the hues of a spectrum based on feeling, lessons, and intuition.

Every single one of us experiences pain. Every single one of us do something to ease it.

I encourage you to remain open-minded as you make your way through the pages of this zine. All of these works have been produced by those affected by the toxic drug crisis in British Columbia.

— LOLA JEČMENICA
NEW WESTMINSTER COMMUNITY ACTION TEAM COORDINATOR



¹ BC Coroner's Report.

INFLATION

By: J.C. DEEN

INFLATION'S disrupting all Nation
People are filled with gloom
There appears to be discordant
vibrations

which adds to a vision of doom

Where are the voices of yesteryear
Trembling with fierce love and hope
Coping with similar morbid fears
Refusing to sink with the boat

Ah yes! I hear times have changed
We're "progressing" beyond all dreams
yet we are still within those
Range of repeated cyclical schemes

Where lies the solution to this
mess

Surely not in repetitiveness

HIROSHI

By: MELISSA KUHN

Hiroshi would greet me
With applause and acclamations
And a tender hearted hug
Yay! Melissa's returned to the barracks!
Egregious was his cherished euphemism
He transcribed it
Copiously in his poetry
Outside art
He used to decipher it.
Unheeding and rollicking
I wane for him stupendously
But he virtuously
Taught me the enlightenment
He alluded to instill in me
And I can discern
purposelessly to release him
To his succeeding
Chapter of vitality

HAIRDO DAY

By: MELISSA KUHN

Hiroshi yearned for a faux hawk unexpectedly at
the crack of dawn

He tenderly smiled and said 'you can
consummate it Melissa!'

I attempted to graze his scalp a little divergently
than his poor, elderly mother,

Who took a bowl to his poor head, shears and
carved encompassing it.

I couldn't say no to his big, round, erroneously
innocent apprehension.

I sat him down and he carefully disrobed himself,
With a whole lot of flamboyancy.

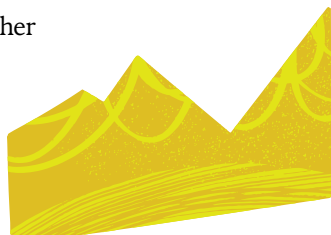
Am I getting any muscle Melissa?

Sure you are Hiroshi, and charmingly smiled.

We played NoMeansNo in the background

And lightheartedly juxtaposed with one another

His faux turned out ok.



MISSION POSSIBLE

By: MELISSA KUHN

Humbly entering the safe injection site
At the Astoria
We are greeted by warm, friendly,
Mostly toothless smiles
MC introduces himself to me
And wants to perform
His latest rap song
Lucy unfortunately is back on dope
They are fragile, these people
But they're giving their situation the best
They joke around
And are oh so grateful
For us cleaning their washrooms
And taking away their empties
They deserve the best these people
Life has given them a tough discord
But a light shines in all their eyes
They are alive for another day
Their prophecy is to live on
Convalescence is apt to come their way

I MET HIROSHI AT THE PSYCHIATRIC WARD 27 YEARS AGO. WE WERE MEANT FOR EACH OTHER. HE ALWAYS KNEW HOW TO TURN MY MOOD AROUND AND CHEER ME UP.

HIS BEST FRIEND DIED OF A HEROIN OVERDOSE IN HIS APARTMENT WHEN HE WAS 29. A YEAR LATER, HE STARTED USING CRACK COCAINE AND SHORTLY BECAME A BINGE USER, ALTHOUGH HE OFTEN HELD A JOB. OUR DOCTOR PLACED HIM IN RIVERVIEW HOSPITAL FOR 5 MONTHS TO TRY TO GET HIM OFF IT. ALTHOUGH HE HAD A FEW RELAPSES, HE WAS QUITE SUCCESSFUL.

WHEN I FINALLY KICKED HIM OUT OF THE HOUSE, HE BECAME CLEAN FOR 14 YEARS AND WE GOT MARRIED.

HE WROTE POETRY, HAD A DELIGHTFUL (OFTEN CRAZY) SENSE OF HUMOR, WAS KEENLY INTELLIGENT AND JUST A SUPER COOL GUY. HE WORKED AND SUPPORTED BOTH OF US ON OUR DISABILITY PENSION. HE WAS WELL LOVED AND DEARLY MISSED WHEN HE HAD A RELAPSE AFTER 14 YEARS AND OVERDOSED ON FENTANYL.

HE WAS CHERISHED AND WILL ALWAYS BE TENDERLY REMEMBERED AND THOUGHT OF OFTEN. HE WAS UNIQUE; HE WAS ONE OF A KIND. HE WAS LOVED ADORABLY BY ALL.

— MELISSA KUHN

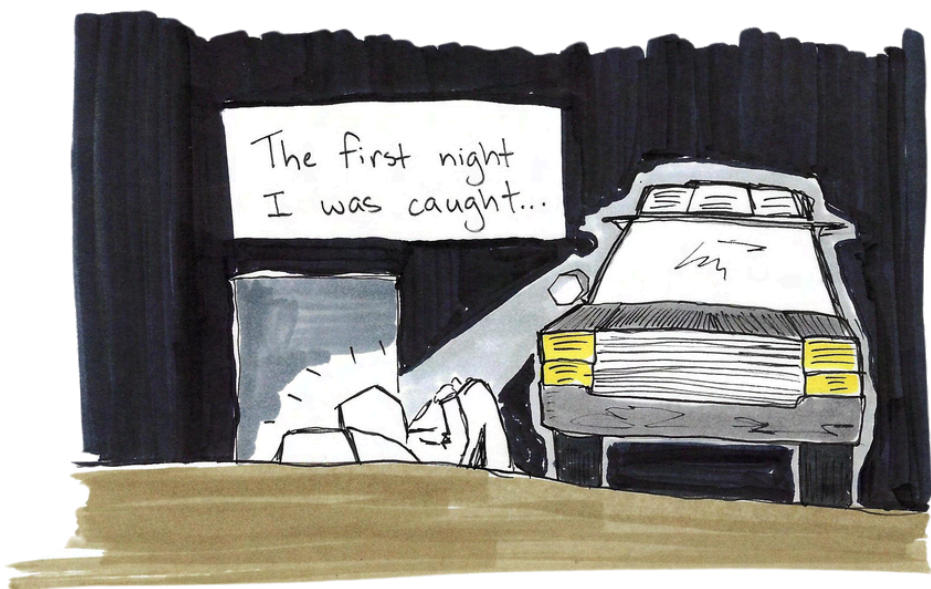


TOWER25

By: PJ PATTEN

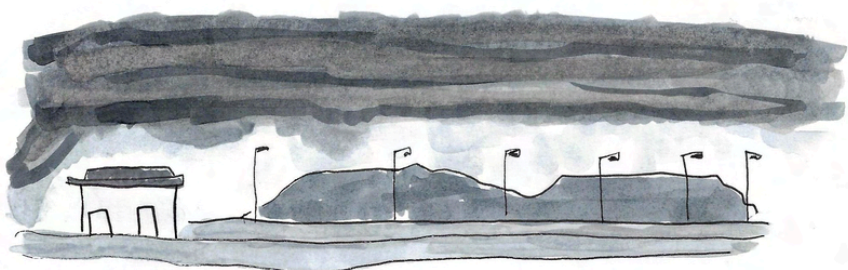






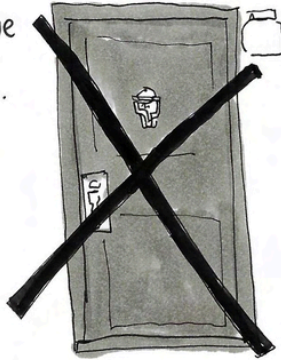


Who was I?
I didn't recognize
my reflection anymore.

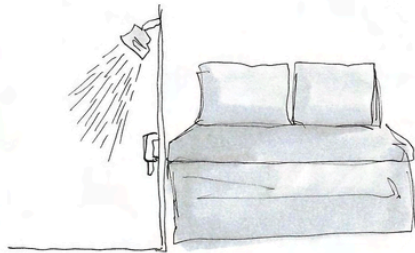
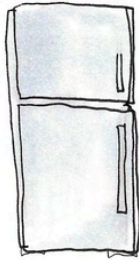
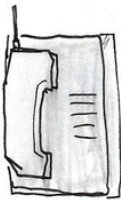


I went from having a
condo five minutes from the beach
to sleeping in a public bathroom
on a cold concrete piss-stained
floor.

My place to live
was gone.



That includes a lot of
things that I took for granted



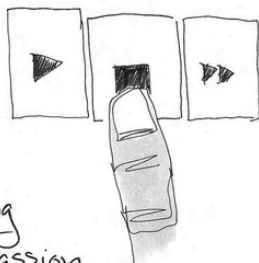
There I was
standing at
the same crossroad
again.



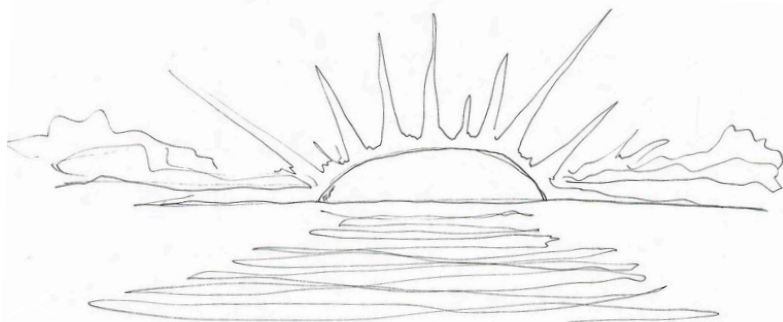
Many times
I chose the
same dark road...

...I realized it was time to stop.

In that one moment of clarity
I recalled a passage from a book
where a monk said the only thing
he was afraid of was losing compassion
for his captors.



That's what he
was afraid of while
being tortured?

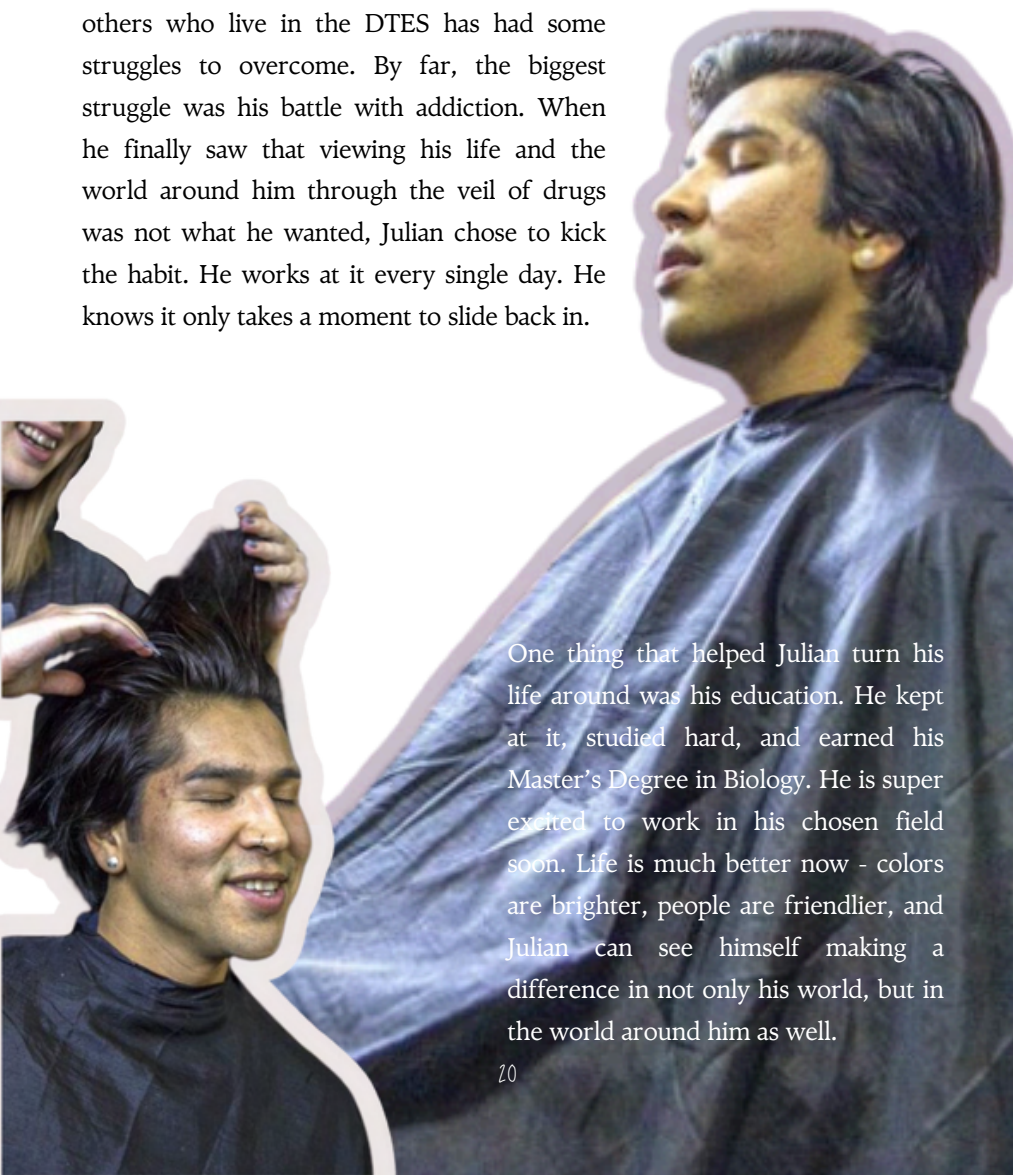


💜 PJ PATTEN IS A POET, AUTHOR, AND ILLUSTRATOR. HIS DEBUT GRAPHIC NOVEL *TOWER25* IS BASED ON HIS OWN EXPERIENCE OF ADDICTION AND HOMELESSNESS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WHERE HE GREW UP. YOU CAN KEEP UP WITH PJ'S WORK AT WWW.PJPATTENART.COM.

2 PAYCHEQUES AWAY

By: MIHAILO SUBOTIĆ

People who live in the DTES have many demons. Drug addiction, housing crises, job issues and many others. Julian, like many others who live in the DTES has had some struggles to overcome. By far, the biggest struggle was his battle with addiction. When he finally saw that viewing his life and the world around him through the veil of drugs was not what he wanted, Julian chose to kick the habit. He works at it every single day. He knows it only takes a moment to slide back in.



One thing that helped Julian turn his life around was his education. He kept at it, studied hard, and earned his Master's Degree in Biology. He is super excited to work in his chosen field soon. Life is much better now - colors are brighter, people are friendlier, and Julian can see himself making a difference in not only his world, but in the world around him as well.



As the photographer for 2 Paycheques Away Registered Charity, which provides complementary shaves and haircuts to the residences of the DTES to help change the stigma of the most controversial code of Canada, V6A, I've come to see more deeply into the heart and minds of the residents by seeing their eyes light up when they finally get the haircut they always wanted. By having the honor of meeting so many unique with life changing stories, I was able to experience and absorb a deeper understanding of feeling someone is emoting and not just capturing what it looks like in a photograph.

MIHAILO SUBOTIĆ IS A FORMER CINEMATOGRAPHER OF 16 YEARS AND HAS BEEN A STILL PHOTOGRAPHER FOR THE PAST 10 YEARS. GIVEN HIS CINEMATOGRAPHY BACKGROUND, HE HAS LEARNED TO USE VISUAL NARRATIVE IN HIS STILL PHOTOGRAPHY SERIES, EVEN IF IT MAY JUST BE A SINGLE PHOTOGRAPH. USING THIS APPROACH, HE FEELS THAT IT BEST HELPS ENABLE HIM TO PHOTOGRAPH THE STORY OF WHAT'S GOING ON IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA.

WHO DROVE KITTY INTO THE GUTTER

By: MONICA WARD

No love for a frozen hand that's shaking
No platter of gold to hold a heart that's breaking
No one to give a truthful thought
Only passion for the taking

Kitty has bruises always for praying
She doesn't cry when she's asleep
But of course she is just playing

Kitty loves the fear of pain
She is slightly mystically insane

Love her blindly, if you can
Darkness will follow death upon any man
That does not understand the way of Kitty
I cannot recall if I ever loved Kitty very much
She was not real enough

Only a dream to touch
But I passed a glance and took a chance
At being her only friend
For loneliness was something to mend
For Kitty all she could do was pretend

If asked about herself
She could never defend a word

No estimate of knowledge to lend to a reader
Maybe just an ounce of hatred to feed her
Confusing, dancing inside of the impossible to greet her

Kitty opened the door, her paws softly scraping
And screeched and spat in horror of no escaping

And near Kitty's door
Light doesn't shine through the shutters
A hand reached down with a knife to cut her
Who drove Kitty into the gutter?

THE NEEDLE AND ITS LIES

A distant past of the need and its lies
Memories of pain reliefs, the Devil's disguise

For if I am weak and lonely
My soul cries, "Will it ever end?"

Emotional freeze
Depression has brought me to my knees

I wait for the answers still
Locked inside the bottle
OK, which pill?



By: MONICA WARD

BENEATH THE BUTTERFLY'S WINGS

By: MONICA WARD

When the creases of sadness ruin your stolen smile
I'll know you've only come back to stay for a while

"Poor kitty", I'll say every time
You're nothing but an unsolved rhyme

Coming to me for help and advice
I've given up, go chase your blind mice

Or did you leave your corner to be saved?
I'm not your healer, I can't deprive you of your pain

You know, Kitty, you'll drive yourself insane
You always come to me with fear, unable to explain

I've never stayed and said, "I told you so"
So I just let go

You and your dreams
That live in your mind

They'll all laugh at you
And then you'll find

You by yourself, you have always been
I am just your invented Queen

I am rich with mystery
I have all the desires

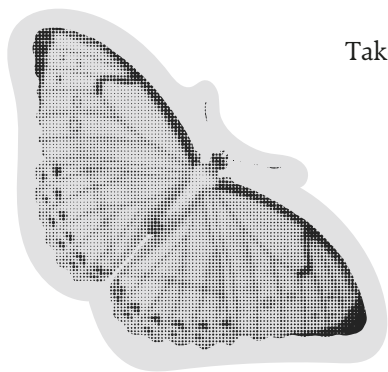
Remember the birds when you wished to fly higher?
They were mine

Taken from what you imagined to be home
There's a home inside your cocoon

But you can't be free
So if you ask me

Leave the magic and the memories
Behind your rings

Sleep, kitty, sleep
Beneath the butterfly wings



ONLY YOU

By: COLIN LEVERS

Her beauty is that of a million diamonds glittering in the sun
Each reflecting its own ray of light making brilliant patterns
The angels gasp in the wake of her presence
She in herself being a masterpiece of God's work
As his giant gentle hands molded her he knew exactly who she would be

She would be the one who could make a man stop in his tracks
Who could content a man just being within his arms
Making him fill with warmth through just a brush of the lips
Whose smile could light up the surrounding darkness
Whose laugh could make anyone believe they had wings

She would be the one who I would fall for
I would see her true beauty in the surrounding gloom
I would long for mere minutes with her
I would long for just the feel of her hand

I would know how lucky I was
I wouldn't mistake infatuation for love
I would realize all prayers had been answered
I would simply pray "I want her to be the one"

LONELINESS

By: COLIN LEVERS

The loneliness that fills my heart and hurts so much I can hardly bear it
It tears at my soul and darkens everything I see

Craving for someone to hold
An angel to take the blackness away and fill my heart with the light of
love

So many tears
I have shed a river of loneliness
Ending in a lake of despair

and I keep praying to see you on the shore
Calling me to safety

Will love ever come
Will the lake ever dry
My angel only knows
So my tears keep flowing down to the lake
As I pray my angel will come



💜 COLIN LEVERS IS A PEER SUPPORT AND HARM REDUCTION WORKER AT THE LOWER MAINLAND PURPOSE SOCIETY. HE IS PART OF THE NEW WESTMINSTER COMMUNITY ACTION TEAM WHERE HE PROVIDES PERSONAL ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT TO THOSE IN NEED.

LOST BOY

By: MARCUS OGILVIE



NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

By: MARCUS OGILVIE

THE WISDOM OF AN INDIGENOUS ELDER I HAVE MET IN A.A. "JUST TRY, TO TRY; TO TRY HARDER."

On a Monday, November 13th, 2023, around approximately 2:00 AM, I almost died of alcohol withdrawal. I had spent all my money on booze on Indigenous Veterans Day on the 8th. For commemoration at my cousin's place (making nothing short of a fool of myself) I was supposed to buy food and ignored all signs telling me not to do what I was going to do. Nothing for the marginalized was really open, except for perhaps on the Downtown Eastside.

I'd call it delirium tremens, not a dream. At any rate, I was out of it. Believing this drunk was on 1856 East Georgia Street where denoting this narrator's upbringing as a child was spent, the apartment was empty. Breathing became labored, so I got up off the couch thinking standing would help. Seconds went by until I saw a haze of translucent, colored, speckled spots throughout the depth of the area of the room. As my lung capacity diminished, I strode to the sliding door in slow-motion leaps likened to that of the moon landers recording from low gravitational pull to the 4th-story balcony with the belief that some fresh air would help.

Painlessly, the volume of my alveoli's absorbing oxygen lessened to a near multi-organ failure. Re-entering the premises upon having no avail with the fresh air; I hustled to the door, grabbing the knob pleading, "God, do not let me die yet."

I woke up inhaling softly but deep for air, starting initially as a wheeze that grew to a gasp. Realizing I was seconds before death was life-changing.

However, it was short-lived through the cunning nature of alcoholism. That day was a futile desperate trudge as well.

THE TOUGHEST CHOICE

By: STEPHEN BYRNE

In the darkness of addiction's grip
I felt my spirit begin to slip
But with courage and strength, I faced the fight
To reclaim my life and set things right

I knew the cost was high to pay
But with each new dawn, I found my way
Through hardship and struggle, I clung to hope
To break free from addiction's choking rope

I held on tight to my gift of life
And fought with all my will and might,
Into the unknown, I bravely leapt
To turn the tides and take the first step

In being in control of my health
I found the power to restore myself
To mend the broken pieces within
And emerge as a warrior, free from sin

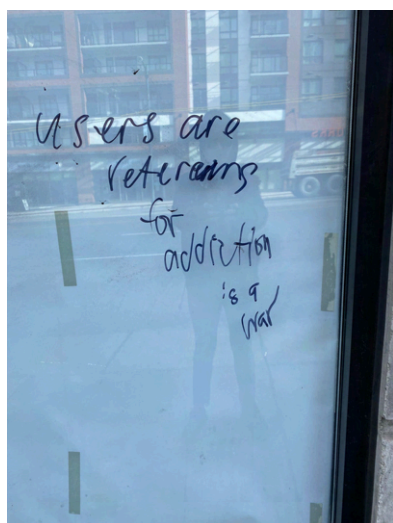
Now I stand strong and ready to share
the lessons I've learned, the burdens I bear
To offer a beacon for others in need,
And guide them towards a future freed

RAINBOW FEET

By: PHOENIX BECK MCGREEVY



Self portrait. I love rainbows, as evidenced by my shoelaces. I've known I was queer in many ways my whole life. This, plus the juxtaposition of the awful environmental impact of the oil slick with the gorgeous colors reflecting the sky, my dark silhouette. This was taken near my home in Hastings-Sunrise on my way to my favorite bodega.

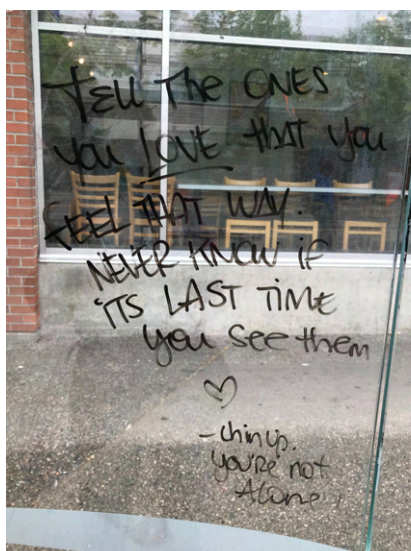


VETERANS

Another self portrait. I am a veteran. This is a war. We are dying, those of us who aren't dead (yet) are facing a mass disabling event. This phrase is written on walls all over East Vancouver, this one is by Main and 6th Ave near my OAT doctor's clinic.

TELL

I don't recall where I snapped this, but it reminds me so much of my dear friend Ben Stephenson who passed away two years ago of an overdose. He always ended every visit or text with "I love you" because he knew this - we may never have another chance. As it turns out, he was right.



💜 PHOENIX BECK MCGREEVY IS A QUEER, AGENDER SETTLER, GRATEFULLY INHABITING THE UNGEDED TERRITORY OF THE COAST SALISH PEOPLE SINCE BIRTH. HAVING SPENT MORE THAN TWO-THIRDS OF HER LIFE AS AN ACTIVE DRUG USER, PHOENIX IS DEDICATED TO IMPROVING THE LIVES OF OTHER SUBSTANCE USERS AND ALL MARGINALIZED AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES THROUGH RESEARCH, MUTUAL AID, AND DIRECT ACTION.

MY LANGUAGE IS COMING BACK

kacwepcwépa ti nqwalúttna

My language is coming back

—————

alán ti 'tpa7

I feel it in my bone marrow

alán ti smáwał

I feel it in my soul

alán ti qéqnekw

I feel it in my salmon heart

—————

aólsemlkan

I was sick

paptkán 'tu7 wa7 uqw7áłmen!

I was always thirsty!

papla7sútmin

alone

—————

lhaxwlhkan jah sqíta

I am healing today

gélgellhkan Jah sqíta

I am strong today

amawílč

Recovered

—————

îtemlhkan

I am singing

pulák7amlhkan

I am drumming

saqúta

Spiritual Dancing

—————

Ucwalmicwkalh

We are ucwalmicw

Ucwalmicwkalh

We are ucwalmicw

wa7 saq̓w i pq̓úsa

the eagles are flying

pala7míntwał i ucwalmícwa múta7 ti tmicwa

the people and the land are one

wá7lhkalh ha ka nása úxwał

Can we go home now ?

tsátawaož

Red cedar

ʔsúlhum̓ ti qu7

Cold water

húzlhkan kítšlec

I am going to cleanse myself

wá7lhkan kálánmin ti wa kwetpáxwats

I am listening to my heartbeat

Kinqwelum ku kalwat

I am looking for medicine

háskan úxwał

I am going home

kacwepcwépa ti nqwałúttna

My language is coming back

stiḡwlhkan (shtao)

I am free

By: TATYANA SCHNEIDER COIN



LEQSAYLHTS — TATYANA SCHNEIDER IS AN UCWALMICW WOMAN WHO WRITES POETRY TO HEAL. THIS IS HER FIRST TIME SHARING ANY OF HER WRITING PUBLICLY.

SAFE SPACE(S) I

Moody Park in the early morning



The solitude, silence, nature, and cold air makes me more present

Friendship Garden, watching the ducks



Any athletic field



Dog parks

By: ANDREW MCKAY

SAFE SPACE(S) II

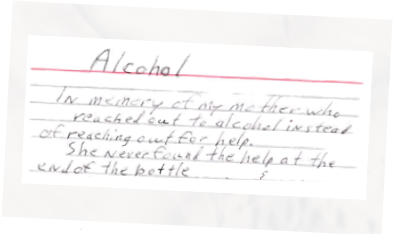
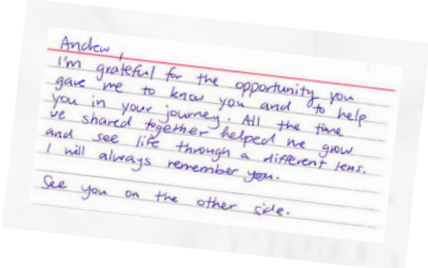
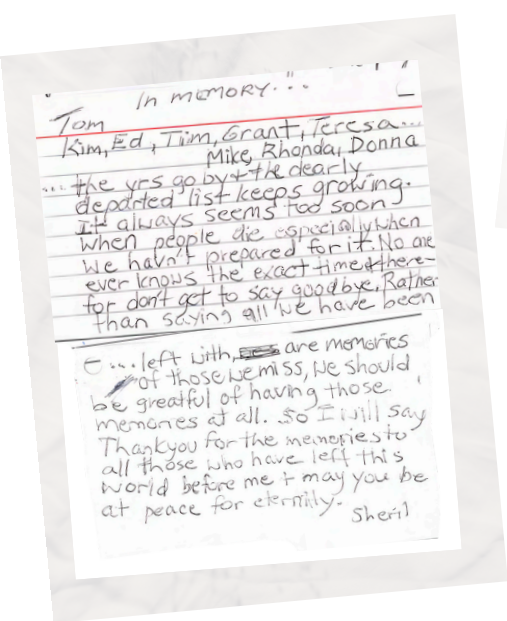


My grandma (mom's mom)'s village.

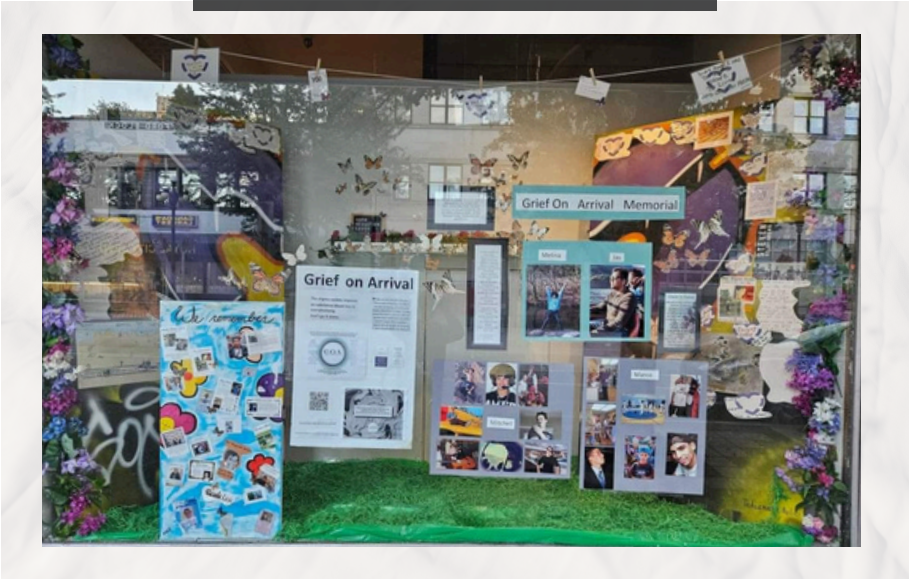
Everyone was nice. I could be free and play happily.

By: FLORA

MESSAGES FOR OUR DEPARTED



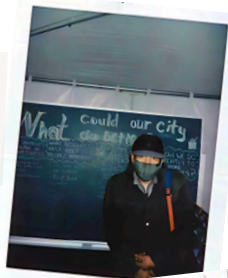
MURAL AT 502 COLUMBIA STREET





Allypo,

I will be who I was, and said I would, I
am going to treatment when I am ready.



A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO:

All the amazing people of
Peer Network

+

Sydney Andrews
De-Anne Bolwell

Sasha Ilić
Colin Levers

PJ Patten

Ria Renouf

Justin Snyder



We miss you everyday.
You were never a problem.



Dear Rhonda

Take care of myself. move on; love Brock
memories.

Make him proud!!

Find a new home. ♥



I AM PROUD ABOUT HAVING SUPPORT -
GNUP. TO BE
I AM PROUD ABOUT LIVING IN CANADA.
I AM PROUD ABOUT HELPING OTHERS.
I AM PROUD TO BE CLEAN & SOBER.
I AM PROUD TO BE WORKING SOON.
I AM PROUD TO BE KIND.
I AM PROUD TO BE LIVING IN A
SAFE NEIGHBOURHOOD.
I AM PROUD TO HAVE ACCESS TO
HEALTH CARE.



Dear Donna:

You need to stop thinking
about the past, think more
about current times.

Love Donna
xxxx

Thank you to the hosts of this zine!



